

# DISCOVERY GUIDE



# 1776

THE MUSICAL

MUSIC & LYRICS BY  
**SHERMAN EDWARDS**

BOOK BY  
**PETER STONE**

CHOREOGRAPHED BY  
**JEFFREY L. PAGE**

DIRECTED BY  
**JEFFREY L. PAGE & DIANE PAULUS**

American Repertory Theater at Harvard University/Roundabout  
Theatre Company's new production

**CENTER  
THEATRE  
GROUP**

Photos by Evan Zimmerman for MurphyMade.



*...first things first!  
Independence! America!  
For if we don't secure that  
what difference will the rest make?*

—Benjamin Franklin



The National Tour Cast of 1776. Photo by Joan Marcus.

It's summer 1776, and the colonies are in crisis. The Second Continental Congress must argue the question of independence from Great Britain. As temperatures rise—both inside and outside the chambers—the founding fathers race to do what has never been done before: cut ties with the British Empire and give rise to the birth of a free nation.



This revival production of 1776 takes place in today's United States of America. A company of actors from the present arrive onstage, where they don costumes to reenact historical events.

**TIME:**  
Present/Summer 1776

**PLACE:**  
Onstage/Philadelphia,  
Pennsylvania



***Nothing's ever solved in foul, fetid,  
fuming, foggy Philadelphia!***

—John Adams

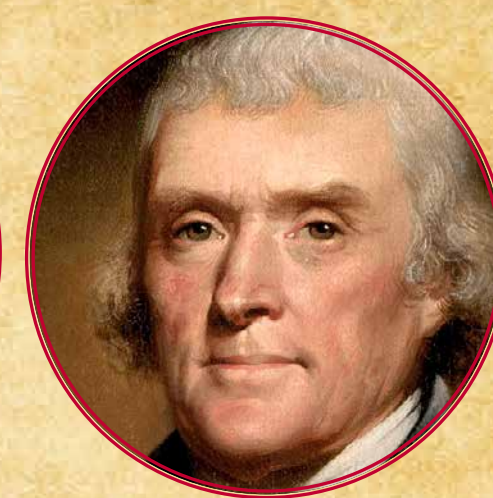
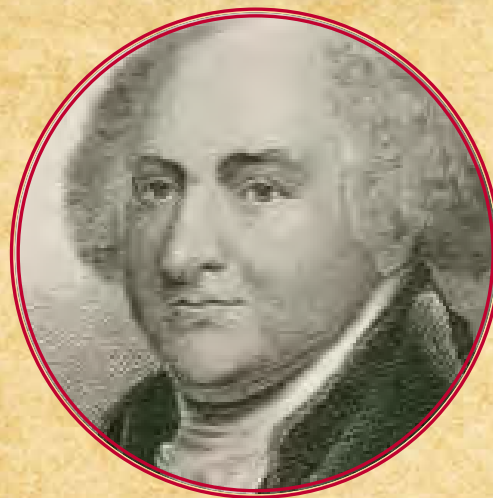
## LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The setting of 1776 is Philadelphia, Pennsylvania—home to the Lenapehoking people. Center Theatre Group's production of 1776 will take place at the Ahmanson Theatre—home to the Tongva and Chumash peoples. Center Theatre Group acknowledges, with deep respect, their memories, their lives, their descendants, and their continued and ancestral stewardship of this land.



# We the People

*insure domestic Tranquillity*



JOHN ADAMS

ABIGAIL ADAMS

THOMAS  
JEFFERSON

BENJAMIN  
FRANKLIN

**Connecticut**  
ROGER SHERMAN  
**Delaware**  
CAESAR RODNEY  
THOMAS MCKEAN  
GEORGE READ

**Georgia**  
LYMAN HALL  
**Maryland**  
SAMUEL CHASE

**Massachusetts**  
JOHN ADAMS  
ABIGAIL ADAMS  
JOHN HANCOCK,  
Continental Congress  
President

**New Hampshire**  
JOSIAH BARTLETT  
**New Jersey**  
JOHN WITHERSPOON

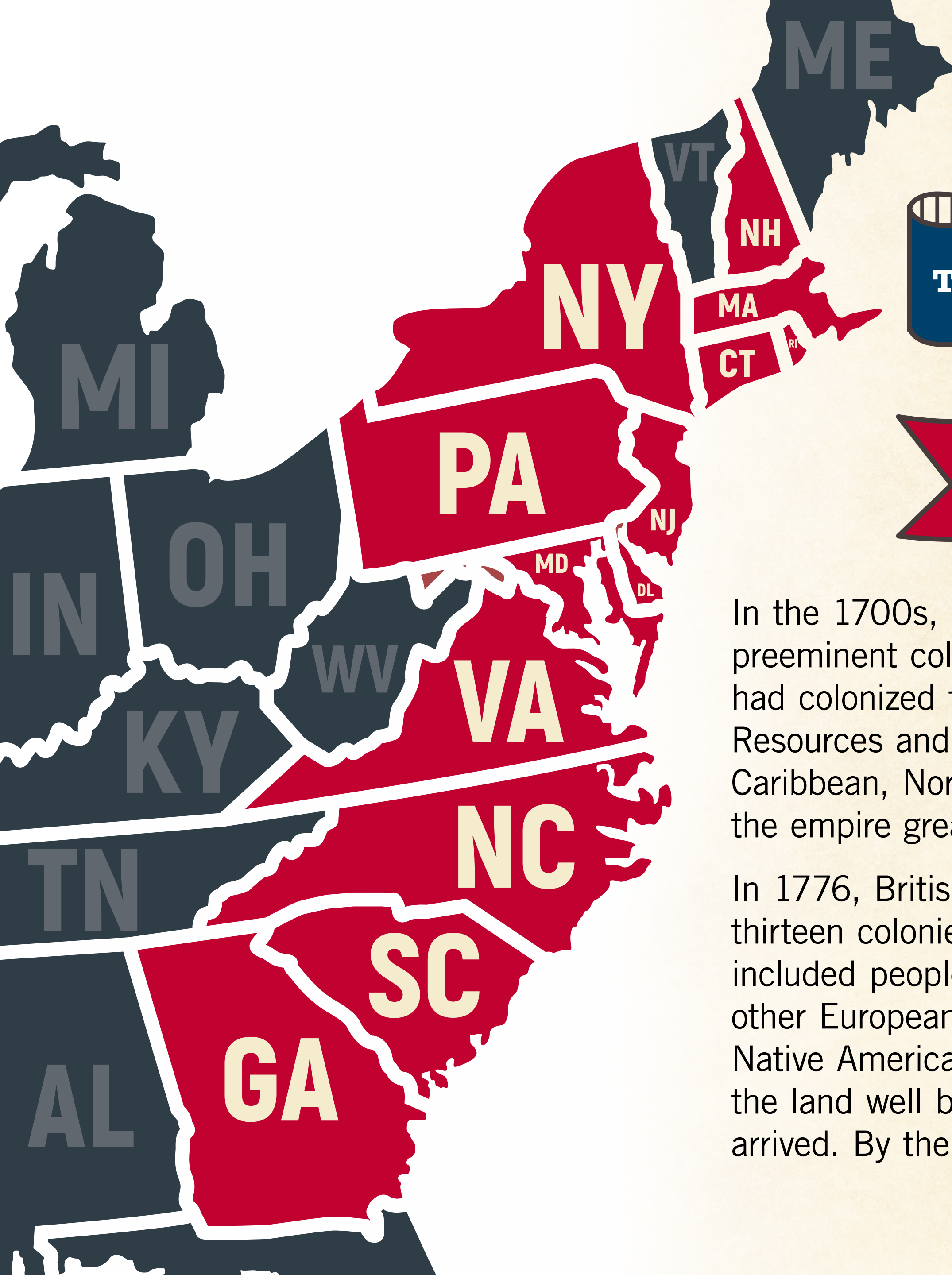
**New York**  
ROBERT LIVINGSTON  
LEWIS MORRIS  
**North Carolina**  
JOSEPH HEWES

**Pennsylvania**  
CHARLES THOMSON  
Continental Congress  
Secretary  
JAMES WILSON  
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN  
JOHN DICKINSON  
ANDREW MCNAIR  
Congressional Custodian

**Rhode Island**  
STEPHEN HOPKINS  
**South Carolina**  
EDWARD RUTLEDGE  
**Virginia**  
THOMAS JEFFERSON  
MARTHA JEFFERSON  
RICHARD HENRY LEE

This production features performers who identify as female, trans, and nonbinary. The cast reflects multiple representations of race, ethnicity, and gender.





The **THIRTEEN**  
**COLONIES**

*We, therefore, the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress, Assembled... and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, that these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States.*  
—The Declaration of Independence

In the 1700s, Great Britain became the preeminent colonial power. The British Empire had colonized territories across the globe. Resources and trade from its colonies in the Caribbean, North America, and India brought the empire great wealth.

In 1776, British North America consisted of thirteen colonies. Its 2.5 million inhabitants included people of British, Dutch, German, and other European descent. Of course, a diverse Native American population already occupied the land well before any European settlers arrived. By the time the American Revolution

began, people of African descent—some born in Africa and others in the colonies—made up one in every five residents.

In many ways, the thirteen colonies were more different than they were alike. Some settlers came seeking religious freedom, and others came in pursuit of riches. The economy in northern colonies centered on urban commerce; in middle colonies, on trade and farms; and in southern colonies, on large-scale agriculture. Governments and culture varied from colony to colony, yet Great Britain considered all colonists subjects of the Crown.





# CREATIVE ARTISTS

The revival production of *1776* now playing at Center Theatre Group features a nontraditional cast that reflects diverse racial, ethnic, and gender identities. **As you watch the show, notice how the casting impacts your experience of the musical. Does it change the way you think about our country's history?**

***Every single person on that stage is someone who would not have been allowed to be inside Independence Hall in 1776.***

**—Diane Paulus**





**DIANE PAULUS**, Co-Director

***As a director I'm always interested in how to make an audience feel like what they're watching is not a relic from the past, but something that we can learn from in the present.***

—Diane Paulus

Director of theater and opera, Diane Paulus is no stranger to Broadway musicals. She directed Tony-award winning revivals of such classics as *Hair*, *Pippin*, and *The Gershwin's Porgy and Bess*. More recently, Paulus has directed the new musicals *Waitress* and *Jagged Little Pill*.

Born in New York, Paulus studied at New York City Ballet and trained in classical piano. She studied social studies at Radcliffe College before earning her master's degree at Columbia University School for the Arts. She currently serves as artistic director of American Repertory Theater at Harvard University.

When approached about a revival of *1776*, Paulus confessed, "I had a vague assumption it was a kind of a celebratory look at American history." Upon later reading the book, she recalled, "I was knocked out of my chair with how relevant the words were, how powerful this subject matter was. Immediately, I felt that this should be revived."

The production went on hold for two years during the pandemic. Paulus originally hired Jeffrey L. Page as a choreographer; but as their working relationship deepened, she invited him to co-direct the production with her.

**JEFFREY L. PAGE**, Choreographer/Co-Director

***Looking at this story—the founding of our nation through the lens of feminism—is stunning, a testament to what Diane brings to this piece. What I bring to it is my perspective as a Black man.***

—Jeffrey L. Page

Choreographer and director Jeffrey L. Page grew up in Indianapolis, Indiana, where he began his theatrical journey as a member of Asante Children's Theatre. He joined the American Cabaret Theatre before leaving to study dance performance at The University of the Arts, School of Dance in Philadelphia.

In Los Angeles, Page's career focused on choreography for film, tv, and live shows. He worked on creative teams for stars such as Beyonce and Mariah Carey. Then he moved to New York to perform on Broadway in *Fela!* Years later, he left his job as choreographer for "So You Think You Can Dance" to study theatre directing at Columbia graduate school.

Page has described co-directing *1776* with Paulus as both a "profound learning experience" and a deeply meaningful collaboration. His work on *1776* marked his Broadway debut as a director.

Page's contributions continue offstage, too. In Los Angeles, he previously served as the Program Director for Inglewood Unified School District's and Santa Monica College's Theatre Arts Education Collaborative. Today he lectures at Harvard and Julliard and spearheads his own nonprofit *Movin' Legacy*, dedicated to the promotion of African and African diasporic dance.



## **SHERMAN EDWARDS**, Composer and Lyricist

Born in New York, Sherman Edwards (1919-1981) was a history buff. He studied history at New York University and Cornell before serving briefly in the Air Force during WWII. He then joined the front lines of James Monroe High School as a history teacher. In addition to his life in academia, Edwards pursued his creative ambitions as a songwriter and jazz pianist.

For years, Edwards had entertained the idea of a musical comedy that dramatized [events] leading up to the signing of the Declaration of Independence. When he turned forty, he finally took the leap: he quit his full-time teaching job and dedicated himself to the project. He created the songs for the show but struggled to recruit a librettist, someone to write the script for the musical. Not everyone shared his enthusiasm for American history.

Resolute, Edwards spent months researching the historical context of 1776 and wrote the manuscript himself. After many rejections, he finally gained buy-in from a producer who had only one caveat: they would seek another librettist to rewrite the book.

## **PETER STONE**, Librettist

***[The challenge] is to make it accurate and interesting; the truth and drama aren't necessarily compatible.***

—Peter Stone

Producer Stewart Ostrow approached Peter Stone (1930-2003), who had passed on Edward's project many years prior. However, after listening to Edward's music, Stone reconsidered and agreed to rewrite the libretto for *1776*. At the time, Stone was already a celebrated writer; he had debuted as a playwright on Broadway and received both an Emmy and an Oscar for his screenplays.

Born in Los Angeles to an entertainment family, Stone graduated from University High School. He then studied at Bard College and Yale and spent several years in France writing for radio, film, TV, and theatre. His work on *1776* would earn him the first of three Tony awards of his prolific career. Stone would later be posthumously inducted into the American Theater Hall of Fame.

***I love it when a show I'm working on is in trouble. I'm an ardent puzzle doer, and I love solving the puzzle of it. I like the process.***

—Peter Stone



***1776 certainly paved the way for Hamilton — not just in that it's about our founders, but also in that it engages fully with their humanity. I think it makes them accessible to us in a very real way.***

**—Lin Manuel Miranda**

# EVOLUTION OF *1776*

Considered the forerunner of *Hamilton*, *1776* is a work of historical fiction. No written manuscripts of what actually happened during the meeting of the Second Continental Congress exist. In order to strike a balance of historical accuracy and engaging drama, creator Sherman Edwards and librettist Peter Stone crafted a story that drew from research and source material such as personal memoirs and letters.

The original production of *1776* debuted on Broadway in March 1969 amidst the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, and the recent success of the antiwar musical *Hair*. A surprise hit, it garnered three Tony Awards, including Best Musical. In 1970, it became the first Broadway show to play at the White House; and in 1972, it debuted as a film adaptation.

Roundabout Theatre Company produced the first revival in 1997 and co-produced the current revival with American Repertory Theatre in 2022. A departure from previous productions, the current production of *1776* features a nontraditional cast of multi-racial/-ethnic performers who identify as female, transgender, and nonbinary. In addition to casting, this production reimagines musical arrangements, choreography, and staging to bring new perspectives to an old story.

***...there's nothing more fulfilling than having a chance to continue to work on something and make it better.***

**—Diane Paulus**



The National Tour Cast of *1776*. Photo by Joan Marcus.



# LIFE IN 1776

In the British North American colonies, general society was organized by religion, race, gender, and class. The colonies were religiously diverse; however, the official and preferred faith of the British Empire remained Protestant Christianity. In effect, Christian practices shaped much of colonial life.

Rights and privileges accompanied certain social standings. Rich, White men claimed the highest status. Titled gentry passed power, land, and wealth to their families. Within local government, affluent Protestant land owners typically held significant political power.

Merchants, craftspeople, and artisans made up the middle class. Commoners, often farmers and unskilled laborers, enjoyed more freedoms than indentured servants. Within this racialized patriarchy, free Black people and Native Americans faced restrictions and discrimination, and enslaved people held few to no rights at all.



***By the way, in the new code of laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make, I desire you would remember the ladies. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the husbands. —Abigail Adams***

## REMEMBER THE WOMEN

Free White women in colonial America held many domestic responsibilities yet fewer rights than their male counterparts. Once colonies became established, women focused on running the household and, if applicable, managing servants and enslaved people.

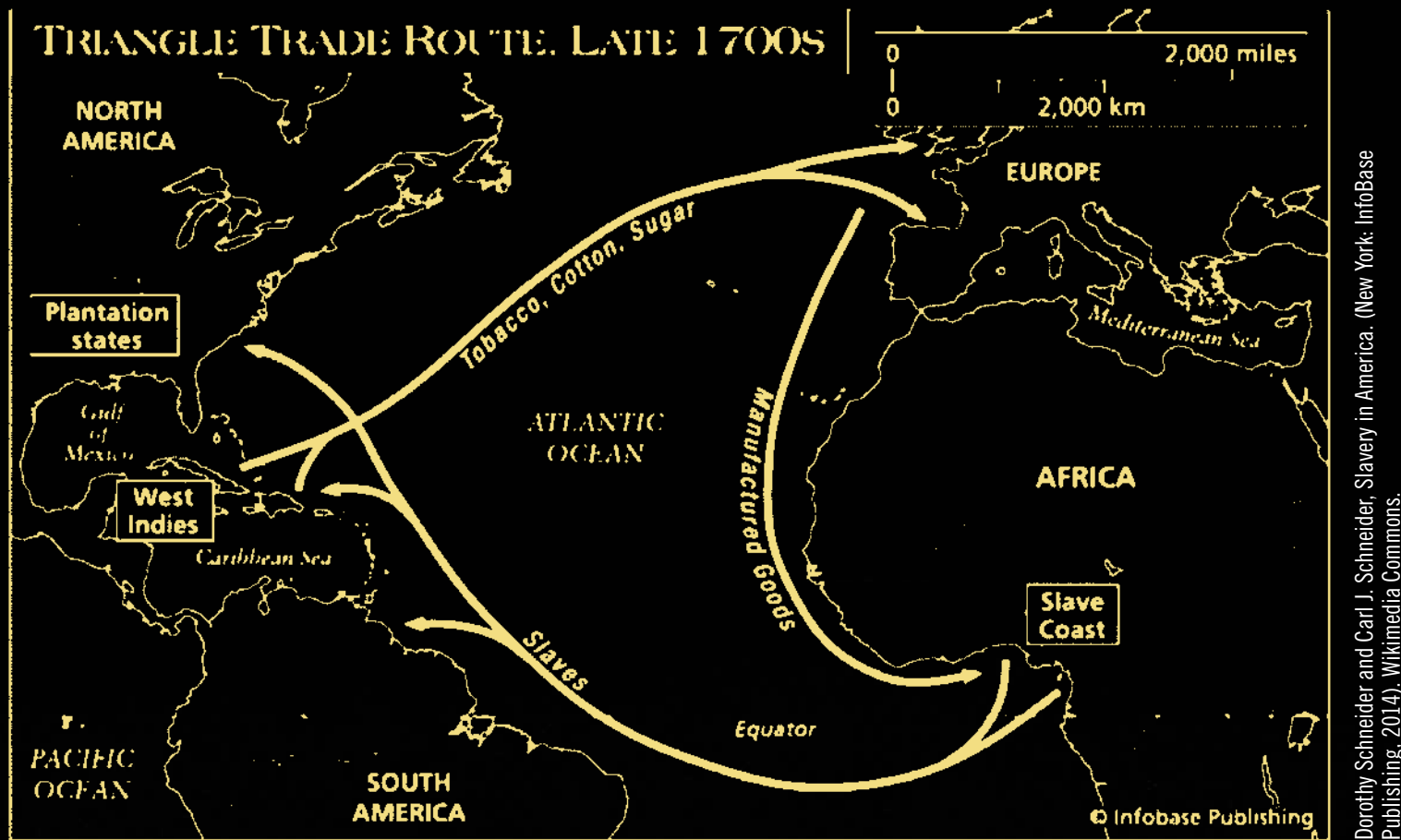
Upper class women and girls would learn etiquette, needlework, and dancing. Middle and lower class women and girls would learn practical skills such as baking, sewing, and soapmaking. Some learned to read in order to study the Bible. Women could not attend college.

Invariably, women were expected to marry and raise children. Once married, women retained certain rights but lost autonomy; for instance, they needed their husbands' consent to own a business. Single women, on the other hand, could sue and be sued, sign legal contracts, and buy and sell property. Regardless of marital status, women could not hold public office nor vote.

In some colonies, Black and Native American women held the same legal rights as White women of their same class-- in theory but not in practice. They faced discrimination based not only on gender but also on race.







The cast of 1776 in American Repertory Theater/Roundabout Theatre Company's new production of 1776. Photo by Joan Marcus.

...[the king] has waged  
cruc war against human  
nature self, violating its  
most sacred rights of life  
& liberty in the persons  
of a distant people who  
never offended him,  
captivating & carrying  
them into slavery in  
another hemisphere.

**Molasses to rum to slaves  
Who sail the ships  
back to Boston  
Laden with gold,  
see it gleam  
Whose fortunes are made  
in the triangle trade  
Hail slavery,  
the New England dream!**

—Edward Rutledge

## SLAVERY

In 1776, delegates passionately argue over what to include in the final draft of the Declaration of Independence. Ultimately, they remove a passage that condemns slavery. Ironically, many who sought freedom from British tyranny and likened their own situation to enslavement, also engaged in and profited from slavery.

Directly or indirectly, all thirteen British North American colonies depended on slavery. In the 1600s, Native Americans made up the majority of slave labor. However, in the 1700s, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade brought millions of enslaved Africans to the Americas.

The vast majority of people enslaved in West Africa ended up in Brazil and on islands in the Caribbean, where they toiled on sugar cane plantations. Ships carried sugar, molasses, and enslaved people to North America for sale in the colonies. Distilleries-- primarily in New England-- used the molasses to produce rum, which traders exported, along with sugar, to Great Britain as part of the triangular trade. Demand for such products fueled the slave trade.

As commonly taught, US history often focuses on the southern colonies' dependence on slave labor to run its large plantations; however, the northern and middle colonies were also complicit in slavery. Enslaved people worked for businesses, in households, and on farms; and some of the largest slave markets could be found in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New York.

From tobacco plantations to the rum industry, slavery formed a cornerstone of the British Empire and influenced every aspect of colonial society.



*I'm afraid I'm not yet certain  
whether representing the  
People means relying on their  
judgement or on my own.*

—Lyman Hall

A depiction of the Second Continental Congress voting on the United States Declaration of Independence. Historical Society of Pennsylvania/Wikimedia Commons.

*I have come to the conclusion that one useless man is  
called a disgrace—that two are called a law-firm—and  
that three or more become a Congress.*

—John Adams

Gisela Adisa. Photo by Evan Zimmerman  
for MurphyMade.

## CONGRESS

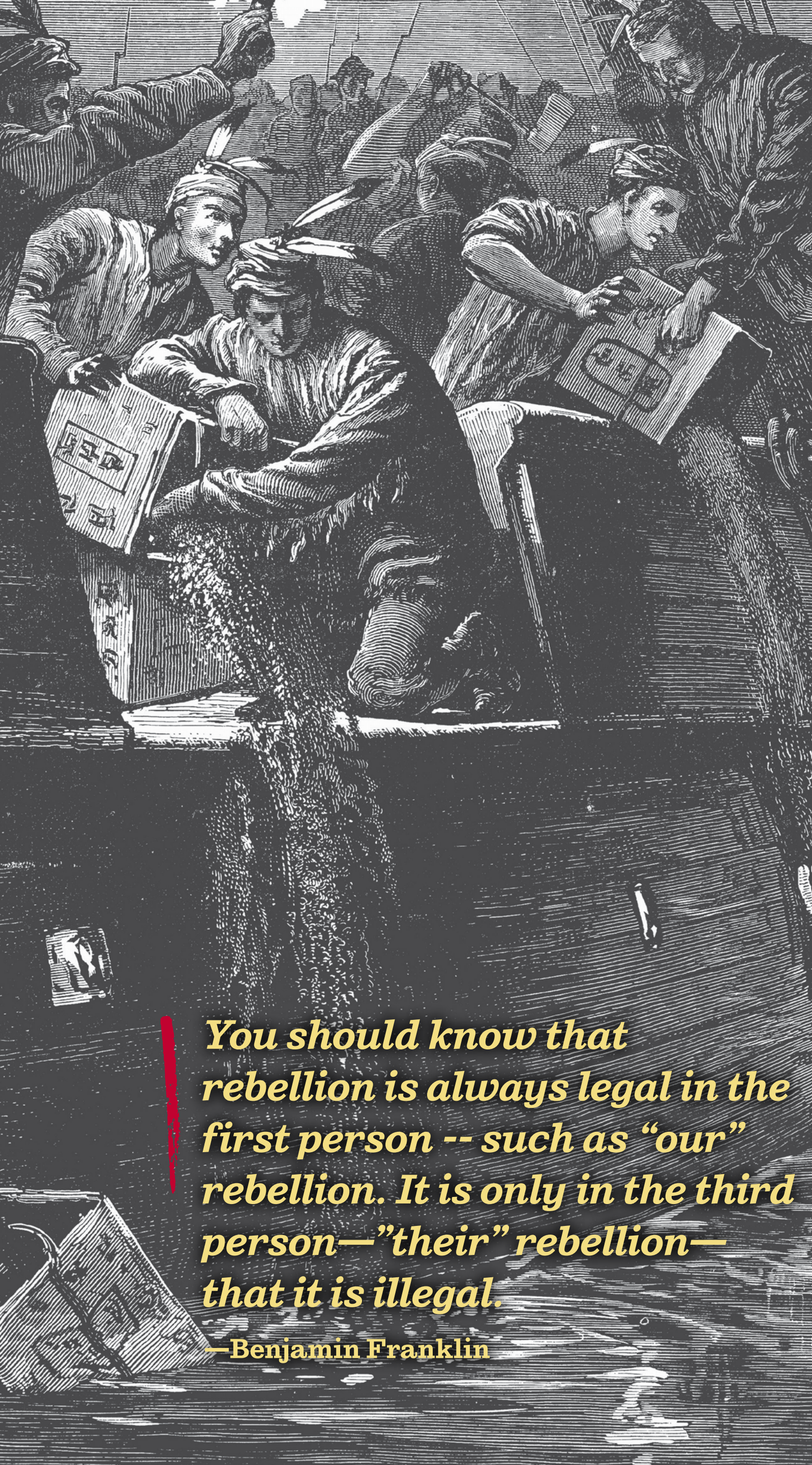
For much of the 1700s, local colonial governments managed domestic affairs with little interference from Great Britain. However, under King George III, royal authorities began imposing more laws.

In fall of 1774, representatives from the British North American colonies met in response to the Intolerable Acts. Known as the First Continental Congress, delegates created a list of grievances to submit to the British government.

After fighting between British troops and American militiamen broke out at Lexington and Concord in spring 1775, the Second Continental Congress reconvened. It established the army, named George Washington commander-in-chief, and petitioned King George III for a peaceful resolution. However, in August 1775, the king declared the colonies in “open rebellion”. Britain cut off trade with the colonies and no longer promised protection.

When the Second Continental Congress met in summer 1776, delegates voted to declare independence from Great Britain. Representatives then fervently debated the Declaration of Independence and approved the final draft on July 4, 1776. The Continental Congress set the foundation for the legislative branch of US government that we know today.





***You should know that rebellion is always legal in the first person -- such as “our” rebellion. It is only in the third person—“their” rebellion—that it is illegal.***

**—Benjamin Franklin**

***Sometimes I fear that there is no longer a dream but only the DISCONTENTMENT***

**—John Adams**



Years prior to the American Revolution, discontentment with foreign rule in the colonies had been growing. Many colonies had already tasted self-government. In the 1760s and 70s, Massachusetts colonists violently opposed new regulations imposed by the British Empire.

Colonists asserted they were being unfairly taxed and not properly represented in British Parliament. They refused to pay tax collectors, boycotted certain products, and taunted British soldiers who had been sent to maintain order. Events such as the Boston Massacre and

the Boston Tea Party led the British government to respond harshly.

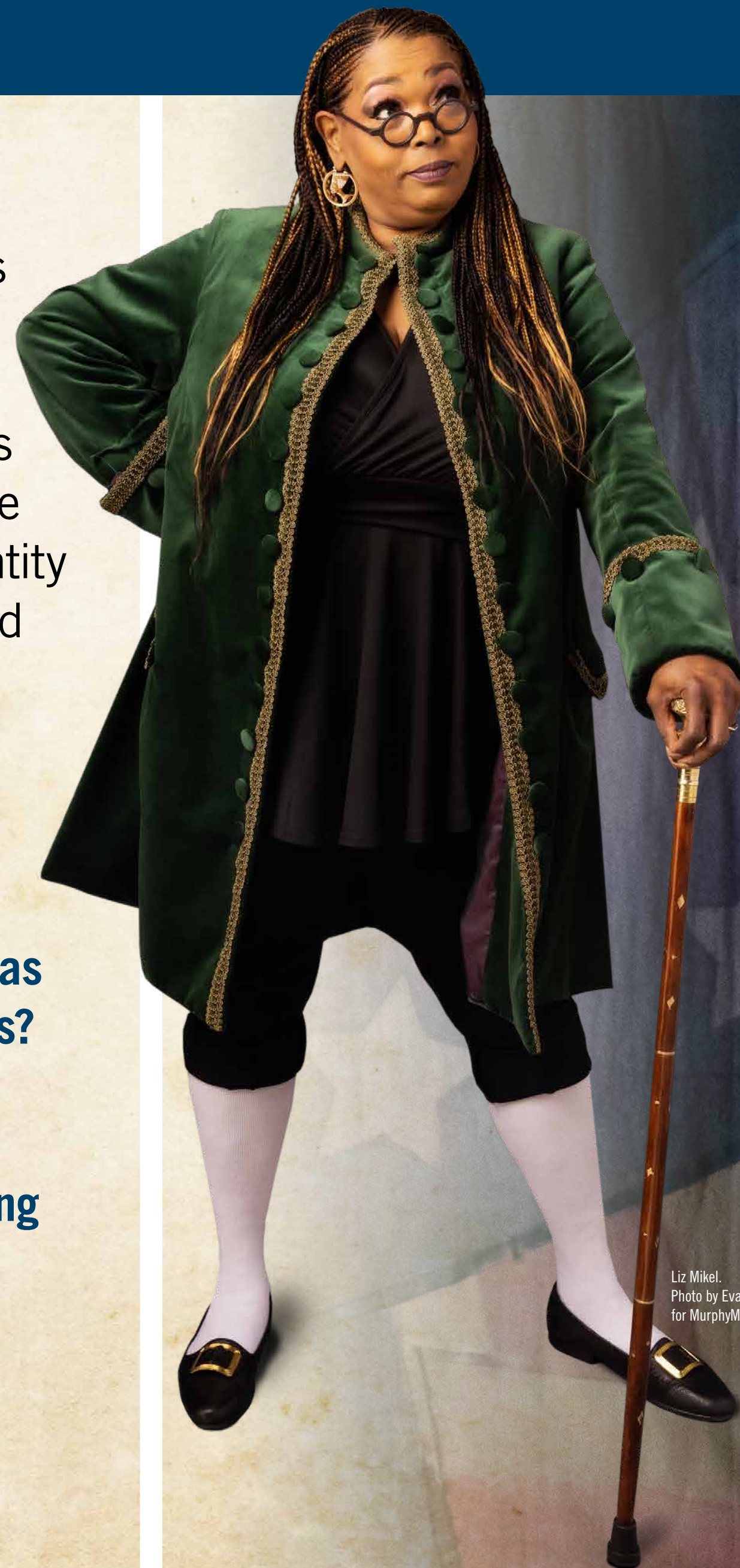
Britain attempted to gain control over its unruly colonies with the Coercive Acts, aka Intolerable Acts, and aimed to disarm colonists by seizing ammunition. This set the stage for the first military skirmishes of the Revolutionary War. However, not all colonists were convinced that independence would be the best course of action. In fact, many colonists remained loyal to the crown while others chose to remain neutral. Months later, even as troops perished in battle, public opinion remained deeply divided.



# AMERICAN IDENTITY

British North American colonies were home to many distinct cultures—each with their own values, customs, and beliefs. As the Declaration of Independence was signed, a new national identity was beginning to take shape and continues to evolve today.

- ★ What does it mean to “be American”?
- ★ What brings us together as a nation? What divides us?
- ★ How does the casting of this production help expand your understanding of American identity?



***We’ve spawned a new race here—rougher, simpler, more violent, more enterprising and less refined—we’re a new nationality, Mr. Dickinson—we require a new Nation.***

—Benjamin Franklin

Liz Mikel.  
Photo by Evan Zimmerman  
for MurphyMade.



# REVOLUTION

The idea of revolution often focuses on radical change. It can be a dramatic change in the way something works or in how you think about something. In a socio-political context, revolution commonly refers to a sudden change of power structure.

- ★ When is revolution right and necessary? When are there other options?
- ★ What would compel you to rebel against someone or something?
- ★ Have you ever felt as if you had no voice or choice? What did you do?

***This is a revolution, damnit! We're going to have to offend somebody!*** —John Adams

***If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation.***

—Abigail Adams



# INDEPENDENCE

The Declaration of Independence was not a declaration of war but rather an explanation of what colonists were fighting for. Notably, the inalienable rights of “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” did not extend to all inhabitants of the thirteen colonies.

- ★ What does independence mean to you?
- ★ How are independence and freedom the same? How are they different?
- ★ What would it take for all Americans to be truly free?

*...for me, the story of this musical highlights that 1776 means very different things to different people.*

—Jeffrey L. Page

Kristolyn Lloyd in American Repertory Theater/Roundabout Theatre Company's new production of 1776. Photo by Joan Marcus.





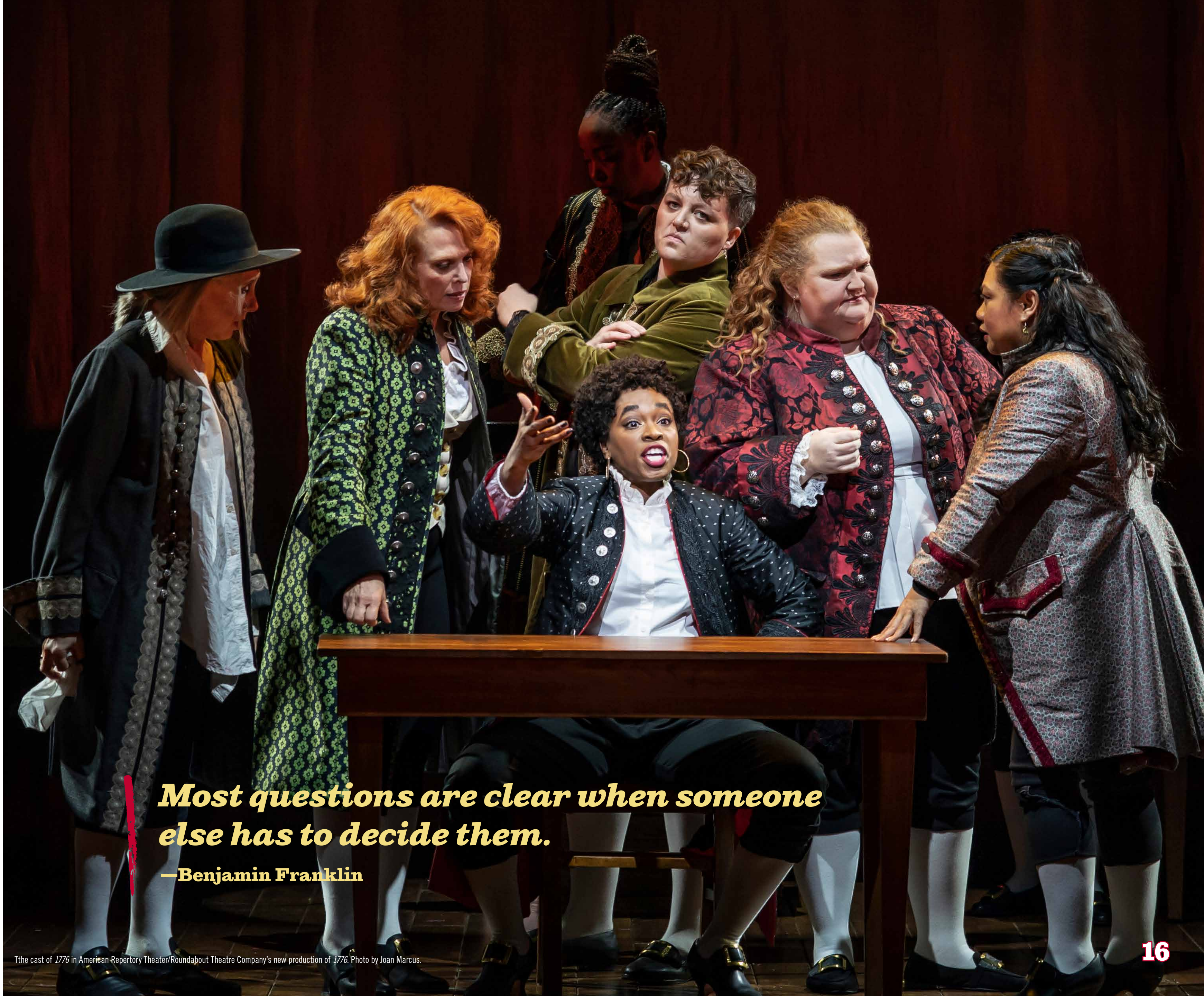
# HONEST RECKONING

This reimagined production of 1776 invites the audience to ask big questions. It encourages us to explore the complicated, and often uncomfortable, truths surrounding the founding of our nation.

- ★ Who was left out of this nation's decision-making and founding documents?
- ★ What contradictions does the Declaration of Independence reveal?
- ★ How has this nation's past shaped your life today?

*Most questions are clear when someone else has to decide them.*

—Benjamin Franklin





## STUDENT MATINEE PROJECT FACULTY

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Resident Teaching Artist

**Christine Breihan**  
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**Ramy El-Etreby**  
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## FUNDER CREDITS

Center Theatre Group's Student Matinee Program is made possible in part by the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, California Arts Council, Renee & Meyer Luskin, The David William Upham Foundation, Sascha Brastoff Foundation, Lawrence P. Frank Foundation, Theatre Forward, Ella Fitzgerald Charitable Foundation, Deena and Edward Nahmias, Paramount Pictures, Pasadena Showcase House for the Arts, and Center Theatre Group Affiliates.



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## FURTHER RESOURCES

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Roundabout Theatre Company 1776 Upstage Playgoer's Guide <https://www.roundabouttheatre.org/get-tickets/upstage-guides-current/1776/>

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Jeffrey L. Page Official Website <https://jeffreylpage.com/>

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Slavery and Remembrance <http://slaveryandremembrance.org/>

Understanding Slavery Initiative <https://understandingslavery.com/>





***I SEE AMERICANS  
ALL AMERICANS  
FREE FOR EVERMORE***

**—John Adams**

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